

Keith Mehlin: 'Tis the season for easy thieving 12/07/2003

If men liked shopping, they'd call it research

Cynthia Nelms

Well, it's that time of year again. That time of year that many men fear, the Christmas shopping season.

Personally, I would rather do just about anything than shop. I would even rather watch the Home and Garden Network, or what I call the paint drying channel, than venture into a store anytime between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

My idea of shopping goes like this. You determine what you want, you go to the store that has it, you go to where it is on display, you pick it up, you pay for it and you go home.

And you only do that if you can't buy it on the Internet and have it sent to you.

Many of you, however, will be out shopping this season. Some of you will even enjoy it.

I thought that this week, I would pass on to you some of the tips that might keep you from being a crime victim this holiday season.

Ok, I know that you have read these before. I am only going to repeat some of the more important ones. If you pay attention and follow these, then maybe, just maybe you won't be visited by the Grinch this Christmas.

The first one has to do not only with the shopping season, but also the winter season. If you do not want to walk over the river and through the woods to grandma's house, then please, please, please do not start your car in the driveway and leave it running unattended.

If you enjoy walking everywhere, dealing with unsympathetic police officers and insurance companies, then by all means leave your car running when you are not in it. If you do that, then eventually you will be watching your car going down the street without you in it.

The second deals with checks and credit cards. If you don't want to spend time on the phone this season explaining to the Head Bangers Are Us Music Store that it was not you who wrote that check for the complete CD collection of Metallica, then guard your checkbook and credit cards with your life.

There is nothing more frustrating than to have your checkbook stolen and someone go around and forge a bunch of your checks. You will spend weeks trying to straighten it out.

Always keep track of your checkbook and credit cards. Don't leave them in the car, and ladies, don't leave your purse unattended in a shopping cart. You could pay dearly for a few lax minutes.

On the subject of credit cards, if you are like me, then you get about 3 offers for credit cards a day in the mail. Most of them come with a partially filled out application. Make sure you shred them.

It would not be difficult for someone to get hold of that, change the address, and have a card sent to them in your name. If someone does, then once again you are on the phone, wishing it was you who had bought the plasma TV and didn't have to pay for it.

We talk every year about putting packages in the trunk of your car and not leaving them out in the open. We also talk about burglary prevention for your house. A lot of that is common sense.

You need to know that meth heads will do anything to get money to buy meth. That includes stealing things from your car that you might not think about. Coats, cell phones, CD's, wrapped Christmas presents or anything they might get a few bucks for in a pawn shop or bar. Often the item stolen is worth less than the broken window it took to get to it. The less you leave in your car, the better.

This is something that I don't really understand. Every year we see newspaper articles or TV stories about people stealing Christmas yard ornaments. What are the thieves doing with the yard decorations? Putting them in their yard trying to win the Nonpareil's Christmas lights contest? If you steal your Christmas decorations then maybe you shouldn't be celebrating Christmas.

Anyway, keep your head about you when you are out shopping this Christmas season. A little common sense can go along ways.

And if you see me out, then you know that my wife finally convinced me that I needed to help with our shopping.

Keith Mehlin is chief of the Council Bluffs Police Department